

Reference Publications Office

The Reference Publications Office (RPO) works in concert with academic and administrative offices throughout the Institute to publish timely, accurate, and authoritative information about MIT's organization, programs, and policies.

Signaling a new direction for the MIT Bulletin, this year's course catalog was 336 pages long—less than half its previous length—and 6,000 copies were printed as against 11,000 copies the previous year. A companion volume containing subject descriptions, which previously had constituted more than half the bulk of the catalog, was also printed. This book was distributed to faculty and staff who advise undergraduates and deal with student registration and enrollment. Two thousand copies were printed.

Taking both books into account, the net result was a 63 percent reduction in page count, saving 8.33 tons of paper. Printing and manufacturing costs fell from \$35,000 to \$20,000, a 43 percent reduction.

Moreover, because RPO had consulted extensively before changing the catalog's format, the new catalog and its companion volume were received without complaint in the MIT community. Indeed, our expectations, based on survey data, had been that most catalog users would be little affected by the format changes, and this was borne out by the response on campus.

The new catalog featured a visionary painting, "Looking Back to a Bright New Future," by New York artist Julie Mehretu, on its cover. The dramatic design, together with a reusable cover design for the volume of MIT Subject Descriptions, was the work of Wilcox Design.

The signal event of the year for RPO staff was the office's relocation from Building E28 to E38, about 50 yards away on Main Street. Preparation for the move, including space allocation and the outfitting of a suite of offices, consumed a good part of the summer and fall, with the actual move taking place in December. With the assistance of Facilities staff and consultants, the transition was well planned and went remarkably smoothly, with minimal downtime for office services.

Over the next few months, the RPO staff completed the furnishing of its new space and began to enjoy what has become a calming, thoroughly congenial work environment. Staff cohesion, morale, and a sense of office identity have never been higher.

As the summer of 2010 approached, it became time to begin preparations for MIT's sesquicentennial year. For the Course Catalog, Forsythe Design created a stately cover design that honored MIT's 150th anniversary with an original discovery encompassing the prime numbers between 7 and 31—a puzzle, if you will, in the best MIT tradition.

Also, since it had been decided during the year that the 2010–2011 editions of the Faculty & Staff and Student directories would be the last MIT directories printed on paper, RPO resolved to make them collector's items. Tim Blackburn Design was hired, and a plan soon emerged to add to each directory a commemorative section celebrating the very special people of MIT—all the dedicated, gifted, and unsung individuals at every level who have sustained the Institute through the years, renewed it, and kept its living laboratory humming.

Stuart Kiang
Director